



# Society of the Whole

Nisga'a culture is based on an ancient system of contribution and sharing known as Saytk'ilhl Wo'osim', or "common bowl." In Nisga'a society, it is understood that everyone relies on the same resources and community; therefore, all must contribute. Today, Nisga'a government delivers education, health, and social services under this guiding principle. As Nisga'a government policies and programs continue to evolve, the common bowl concept of fairness will continue to guide the way.

## **Nisga'a Valley Health Board**

Nisga'a government believes that community involvement in health care is critical to the health and well-being of its citizens. In 1989, the Nisga'a began managing their own health care system through the Nisga'a Valley Health Board. Registered under the *Society Act*, the Nisga'a Valley Health Board includes representatives of the four Nisga'a villages, and an elected representative from the non-Nisga'a community. The board is responsible for creating and maintaining facilities and promoting medical and public health care programs. Nisga'a Valley Health Board operates a diagnostic centre at New Aiyansh and satellite clinics in the other villages.

The Nisga'a Valley Health Board continued to provide health services to the Nisga'a regions as outlined in the Transitional Funding Agreement. Discussions continued between the Nisga'a Valley Health Board and British Columbia about the

contract for service provision in the Nisga'a region. Initial discussions began between the Northern Health Authority and the Nisga'a Valley Health Board regarding roles and responsibilities. While Provincial Health Authorities were restructured from 52 to 6 during the reporting period, the Nisga'a Valley Health Board remained an independent, unique health authority with a direct relationship to the provincial ministries of Health Services and Health Planning.

During the reporting period, Nisga'a Lisims Government contributed \$200,000 to the Nisga'a Valley Health Board for the delivery of health care services, and British Columbia contributed \$1,310,518 specifically for physician, diagnostic, and treatment services.

Under the Fiscal Financing Agreement, Canada transferred \$34.8 million to NLG to support the delivery of programs and services in the areas of health, education, social programs, income assistance, and local services.

## **Child & Family Services**

As part of its responsibility for child and family services, Nisga'a Lisims Government has been delivering family support services and special needs programs since 1994. Since the effective date, Nisga'a Child and Family Services (NCFS) has also been preparing to provide foster care. Seven people are employed in NCFS, working directly with the four communities. NCFS also

owns and operates a care home in Terrace for Nisga'a children in foster care transition.

NCFS solicits advice from the four communities through the Joint Management Committee, which includes representatives from the village governments, Community Resources Committee, and social development workers. NCFS acts as an advocate for families and children in crisis and offers various family support and recreation programs in Nisga'a villages.

In May 1996, British Columbia entered into an agreement with the Nisga'a Nation which enabled NCFS to deliver a wide range of family support services. In January 2002, British Columbia and NCFS entered into an agreement for Phase 2 services, which include guardianship and support services to Nisga'a residing on or off Nisga'a Lands. B.C. provided \$152,000 during the reporting period, which enabled NCFS to hire three professional social workers. This has given NCFS the resources to study and approve foster homes and group homes as well as the ability to take over guardianship responsibilities for Nisga'a children in the Terrace-Prince Rupert areas who have been in the care of the Province. Negotiations regarding the devolution of most child welfare services from B.C. to the Nisga'a Nation continued.

#### **Primary & Secondary Education**

Nisga'a Lisims Government recognises the importance of education in fostering and protecting

Nisga'a language and culture. Approximately 560 Nisga'a students in the Nass Valley are enrolled in bicultural and bilingual courses. In the Nass Valley, K-12 education is provided by British Columbia through School District 92 (Nisga'a) school board.

During the reporting period, B.C.'s Aboriginal Education Branch delivered a workshop to School District 92 (Nisga'a) on the advantages of establishing enhancement agreements between school districts and local aboriginal communities. Enhancement agreements provide detailed plans to improve aboriginal student achievement and address specific performance and delivery expectations for aboriginal learners enrolled in public school.

#### **Higher Learning: Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a**

Since 1993, Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (House of Wisdom) has offered Nisga'a-based post-secondary programs in Nisga'a communities and Urban Locals. Scholars from as far away as Japan, Europe, China, and New Zealand have come to the Nass Valley to study at this institution of higher learning.

Serving both Nisga'a and non-Nisga'a students, Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a (WWN) partners with a number of public institutions for the delivery of programs. Through an affiliation with Northwest Community College, WWN offers vocational and technical training, Grade 12



achievement, and university/college preparation. Through an affiliation with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), WWN offers a Bachelor of Arts in First Nations Studies, Nisga'a. Registration and enrolment increased in the Bachelor of Arts program to over 100 students during the reporting period. The program has enjoyed tremendous success with 13 students completing Bachelors of Arts degrees, 17 students graduating from vocational/technical programs, 32 students completing certificate requirements, and over 2,500 course completions to date. WWN is also working to establish a Masters program with UNBC.

Under the terms of the Nisga'a Fiscal Financing Agreement, Canada contributed \$200,000 and British Columbia contributed \$226,000 for the support of post secondary education and training programs. WWN also obtained an Indian Studies Support Program grant of \$170,000 from the federal government. Nisga'a Lisims Government contributed \$200,000 to WWN.

A grant from Human Resources Development Canada to WWN allowed for the launch of a Global Positioning System and Geographical Information System course. This highly successful course — the only one of its kind offered in Northwest B.C. — has attracted students from various Nisga'a government departments. The skills acquired through this course are already returning to the community through ecological, economic, and cultural initiatives.

#### **Access to Justice**

The federal Aboriginal Justice Strategy provides funding to NLG for access to justice programs. These programs encourage the revival of relevant traditional Nisga'a justice practices, develop alternative programming, assist victims of crime, encourage crime prevention, and foster restorative justice.

The relationship between NLG and the federal justice system is notable for its innovation. In the prosecution of fisheries offences, for example, federal prosecutors act on behalf of the Nisga'a Nation and prosecute violations under Nisga'a law. This legal relationship is unique in Canada.

#### **Outreach to Urban Nisga'a**

Nisga'a Lisims Government is dedicated to ensuring that its citizens have access to aboriginal programs and services. Through its urban offices, Nisga'a Child and Family Services serves Nisga'a living outside the Nass Valley, providing support and fostering a sense of community for Nisga'a living in Terrace, Prince Rupert and Port Edward, B.C.

NLG purchased the former Elks Hall in Prince Rupert in 2001. This facility will serve as the centre for the delivery of NLG programs and services for Nisga'a citizens living in the Prince Rupert region.





#### **Ayuukhl Nisga'a Department**

The Ayuukhl Nisga'a Department (AND) of Nisga'a Lisims Government protects, preserves, and promotes Nisga'a language, culture, and history. AND responds to requests from citizens and governments for information on a variety of cultural issues, from Nisga'a spelling and syntax to traditional land use systems and cultural practices.

The AND collection consists of archival, historical, and contemporary documents regarding the Nisga'a Land Question, and general Nisga'a history and culture written by academics, anthropologists, and scientists. During the reporting period, AND played a key role in the development and approval of Nisga'a Nation's flag, the completion of the Canadian Museum of Civilization Custodial Agreement, the creation of the Nisga'a Treaty Gallery at the Royal British Columbia Museum, the securing of copyright for NLG's *bayatskw* (crest) design, and the completion of the speaker's chair in the legislative assembly.

#### **Public Safety & Fire Prevention**

Nisga'a Lisims Government was identified as one of the stakeholders for the Safety System Transformation Project undertaken by British Columbia. This project will ensure public safety by consolidating and updating safety system acts and regulations for fire prevention, electrical equipment, gas installations, and boiler systems.

At the request of NLG, the Fire Chief for the New Aiyansh Village Government was appointed in February 2002 as a Local Assistant to the Provincial Fire Commissioner under the *Fire Services Act*. The Local Assistant ensures the application of provincial legislation in the investigation of fires where there is loss of property.

This is my first full year of teaching. I graduated from this school in 1992. I went on to study for two years at WWN, then completed my studies at UNBC. I wanted to show people that we could do it all here, that we could do it as well as anyone else. My dad teaches here. He taught here for years. It gave me the idea I wanted to be a teacher. My own children go here now.

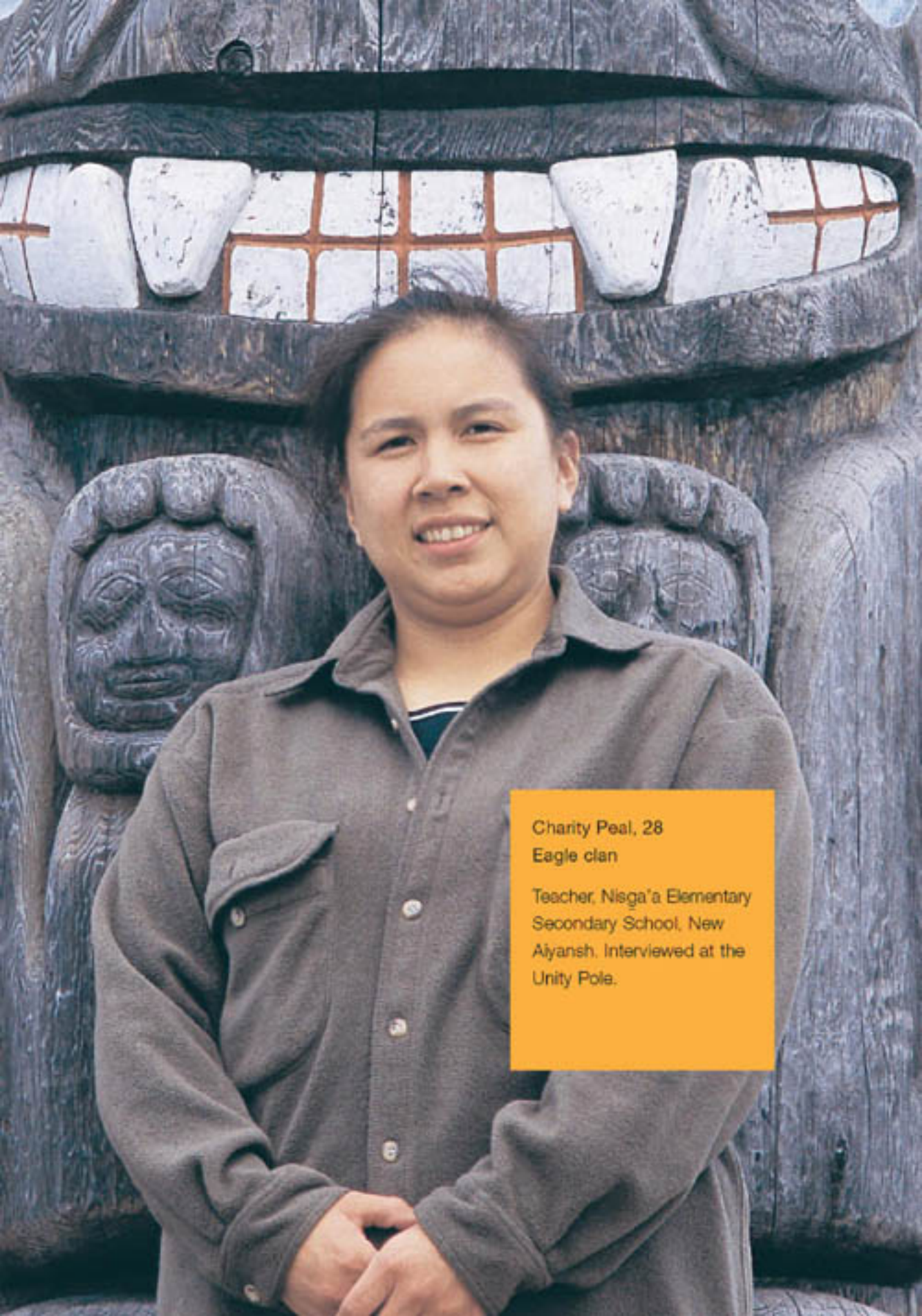
I try to include Nisga'a language in the classroom. I'm not fluent, but I do encourage the kids to use what we know. We try to incorporate our language and culture into everyday things, not just special occasions. This year we learned about *Hobiyee*, Nisga'a New Year. It's held in

February, the beginning of our harvesting year. It begins with the return of the oolichan. It's the beginning of the end of winter, the beginning of the rebirth of the environment. It has to do with the position of the moon. If you imagine the crescent moon shaped like a bowl, you want the full part of the moon on the bottom to show that it can hold the harvest. If it's tipped on its side, the bowl won't hold much and the harvest won't be as good.

With the treaty, I think there will be a definite change — for the better. These students are growing up knowing that there is a treaty. They understand and appreciate that they need the education to get meaningful employment for the rest of their lives. Maybe 50 percent say they are going to WWN. It was awesome to hear them say that. Education, experience — they need this. How else are we going to fill those positions that are coming up?

I think the treaty is having the biggest effect on the younger population. For these kids, it really impacts them because they live with it every day. I think they are proud of it. I took them to Prince George and they were excellent ambassadors of their family, school, village, and nation. That creates more pride. I notice it with my daughter and kids her age. They say they not only have pride in being Nisga'a, but also pride in being Canadian. That is a definite change.

“...they not only have pride in being Nisga'a,  
but also pride in being Canadian.  
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A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a grey button-down jacket over a dark shirt, stands in front of a large, dark wooden carving. The carving features a large, stylized face with a wide, toothy grin, resembling a mask or a spirit. The woman is smiling and has her hands clasped in front of her.

Charity Peal, 28  
Eagle clan

Teacher, Nisga'a Elementary  
Secondary School, New  
Aiyansh. Interviewed at the  
Unity Pole.



We moved back to Gingolx from Port Edward, B.C. in September 2001. I wanted to start a bed and breakfast but I didn't know how to treat non-Nisga'a people when they come by. My oldest daughter said, "Treat them just the way you treat us. Remember they are the same people as we are, they aren't any different. Don't try to be someone you aren't — it will drain you."

I didn't know who to talk to or how to start it. I'd never even been to a B&B. I ask my guests questions about other B&Bs, and they tell me what I need to know. The village didn't have a hotel or any other business like a B&B. I bought everything we needed and brought it up by barge. I haven't regretted it.

I love what I'm doing so it's easy for me. I cooked for all my children, now I'm doing the same thing again. I get up at 6:30 and do my breakfasts, at ten I start my lunch, and then start supper at five o'clock. I still have time to do my speed walk and look after my flowers.

I'm usually full. It's word of mouth. I've had the RCMP, government people, lots of instructors, construction workers and their wives. Guests like to look out and see the tide go in and out. They like to watch the eagles, walk up to the hatchery, walk up and down the village. People from Alberta, Vancouver, Germany — all over. I try to make them as comfortable as I can.

My guests are looking for an impression of the Nisga'a people. They want me to sit with them at the table and talk about our people and what we do, how we go about our traditions. So we talk about that and exchange views. I cook a lot of traditional food: crab, herring eggs, seal, sea lion, cockles, clams, sea prunes, Chinese slipper, black cod, halibut and all kinds of salmon, plus salmon berries, soap berries, jam, and Indian ice cream. They are amazed when we have feasts. Sometimes they want to learn our language. They get excited about that.

With the road opening up, some of the people are excited and are really looking forward to driving up to visit their families. We want to be connected with the other

villages. But I think that there are a few people who are kind of afraid of it. The community will change. But I'm excited, I just thought it was a golden opportunity to start my business.

Since the treaty, people are looking to start up businesses. Some people want to start up a bus company. We need a garage here. One young guy said he wanted to start a gas station. Other B&Bs will open, but I'm not worried. I know I'll have competition, but I think the demand will grow. In the meantime, I'm making renovations; I'm reinvesting. I want the place to be as comfortable as it can be. I added some more guestrooms last year. I have eight now.

It's a challenge. I think you have to be very positive when you start something up. I was afraid, but I worked... If you have a dream, and you want to start a business — follow your dream. Go for it.

"If you have a dream, and you want to start a business  
— follow your dream."



Lavinia Clayton, 59  
Eagle clan

Owner/Operator, Lavinia's  
Bed & Breakfast, Gingolx.  
Interviewed between lunch  
and dinner.